the area disposed between the arms 54 and 55 is approximately hourglass in shape. In such an embodiment, the rearward arcuate portions 62 and 63 and forward arcuate portions 66 and 67 curve outwardly, and the intermediate arcuate portions 64 and 65 curve inwardly.

The intermediate arcuate portions 64 and 65 may be formed so that a user may more easily grip these portions. As shown in Figure 6, one or more ribs 52 may be positioned on the outer surface of the intermediate arcuate portions 64 and 65. Alternately, a portion of the arms 54 and/or 55 may have a roughened texture to enable a user to more effectively grasp and manipulate the specimen-handling tool 24, such as is shown in Figure 10 at 51.

The arms 54 and/or 55 may include fewer or more arcuate portions than the three arcuate portions described above, such as the specimen-handling tool shown in Figure 11. The arcuate portions of the arms 54 and/or 55 may have a more or less pronounced arcuate shape than what is depicted in Figure 6. For example and as shown in Figures 10 – 12 and 18, other configurations of the arms 54 and 55 may be used in the specimen-handling tool 24.

The tip portions 56 and 57 may be variously formed to enable a user to manipulate a specimen. The tip portions 56 and 57 may be formed to include a surface such as the surfaces 70. The surfaces 70 may be variously shaped and, in particular, one or both of the surfaces 70 may be curved (as shown in Figure 10) or flat (as shown in Figure 6). The surfaces 70 may be rough or smooth. Also, structures such as the ridges 78 that are depicted in Figure 11 may also be positioned on one or more of the surfaces 70. The surfaces 70 may be disposed so that they are at least somewhat facing each other, thereby enabling a user to grasp a specimen and hold it between the surfaces 70. As shown in Figure 10, the tip portions 56 and/or 57 may curve outwardly, and may, in some embodiments such as is shown in Figure 11, end in a relatively sharp edge 74. One or both of the tip portions 56 and 57 may include a point, such as the point 80 shown in Figure 10 or a fork 82, also shown in Figure 10, or any number of other configurations.

The specimen-handling tool may be formed from a variety of materials, including, for example, plastics including polycarbonate, polystyrene, polypropylene, polyethylene, polyvinylchloride, or any other type of polyolefin.

Referring now to Figures 15 and 16, an overlying member 23 may be disposed over at least a portion of the surface 44 of the carrier 22. At least a portion of the cavity 30 may be formed by the wall 31. The overlying member 23 may take the form of an adhesive-backed label that adheres to at least a portion of the surface 44. The overlying member 23 may overly any combination of the first well 26, the second well 28 and the cavity 30.

The overlying member 23 may also be used to seal the first and second wells 26 and 28, respectively. In some embodiments, the overlying member may be used to regulate the rate of water vapor transmission to and from the wells 26 and 28 of the carrier 22. The overlying member 23 may also be configured so that, if the overlying member 23 is removed prematurely or inadvertently, it may be easily reapplied to the carrier 22 so that the wells 26 and 28 may be resealed.

The overlying member 23 may also be used to retain the specimen-handling tool 24 within the cavity 30. The overlying member 23 may also be configured only to retain the specimen-handling tool 24 within the cavity 30. In some embodiments, the overlying member 23 may be adhered to at least a portion of the specimen-handling tool 24 so that, when the overlying member 23 is removed form the carrier 22, the specimen-handling tool 24 is also removed from the carrier 22. Although this may be accomplished in many different ways, the intermediate arcuate portions 64 and 65 may, when the specimen-handling tool 24 is positioned within the cavity 30, be level with or rise slightly above the surface 44 so as to contact and be adhered to the overlying member 23.

As shown in Figure 16, a plug 86 may also be used to at least partially seal each well 26 and 28. In such a configuration, the overlying member 23 does not need to seal the well that contains the plug 86, but may merely be positioned above the well 26 and/or 28. The plug 86 may be formed from a variety of materials, including, for example, rubber, wax, silicone, or any of a variety of plastics. In some embodiments, a film cover 86, shown in Figure 14, may also be applied to a portion of the carrier 22, such as, for example, the well 28.

In some embodiments, the overlying member 23 may be adhered or otherwise connected to one or more of the plugs 86 so that, when the overlying member 23 is separated from the carrier 22, one or more of the plugs 86 may also be removed. The plug 86 may also be removed with the specimen-handling tool.

The invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the scope and spirit of the inventive characteristics thereof. The present embodiments therefore are to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive, the scope of the invention being indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description, and all changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are therefore intended to be embraced therein.

It is emphasized that the Abstract is provided to comply with the rules requiring an abstract that will allow a searcher or other reader to quickly ascertain the subject matter of the technical disclosure. It is submitted with the understanding that it will not be used to interpret or limit the scope or meaning of the claims. 37 CFR 1.72(b).